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'Cat Tracks

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Baseball play shapes life



Mike Avery '82

By Mike Avery '82

It wasn't just the most memorable moment of the College World Series; it was the most memorable event in my entire baseball career. I've replayed it countless times in my mind, trying to understand why it has held me spell-bound for 25 years.

I've often wondered if my teammate, Ron Webb '72, felt the same transformational impact of The Play. Only a simple glance of mutual respect passed between us afterwards: "Good job."

Ron was the Linfield catcher and everyone looked up to him. I was a timid freshman on a team of seasoned players on their way to a national title. Only a single obstacle stood in the way – a Tennessee team threatening to end our quest with a late rally. A lead-off double in the eighth had left them in an enviable position in a 7-7 game. In all likelihood they would score. But fate intervened with The Play.

It was the boldest, yet most dangerous call anyone could make. Over the course of 60 games we had practiced it a few times and had even tried it on occasion when a game was well in hand. But this was no ordinary game – it was the title game of the 1971 NAIA National Championship.

The odds of The Play succeeding were minimal and there was considerable risk. I doubted that Coach Ad Rutschman '54, with his years of experience, would have called for it. But Ron was our leader, our All-American. To my disbelief, I heard his calm voice over the dull background chatter calling for it NOW – the pickoff play from the catcher to the rookie shortstop.

Had Ron seen complacency in the runner's eyes? Had he forgotten that we

had attempted the pickoff play only a handful of times and never with success? Had he forgotten that I had made two errors earlier in the game? Didn't he know that disaster usually happens in threes?

An errant throw could sail past second base into the outfield, scoring the runner. There was also a chance of hitting the runner as he slid back in. The odds of picking him off, even with his aggressive lead, were, in my estimation, 100-to-1.

My heart raced as I flashed Ron the pre-agreed-upon return sign of confirmation. The pitcher, Vince Doherty '72, heaved an anxious sigh. He gazed intently, not at the runner dancing off second, but at me. He was asking, "Do you know that the national championship is riding on the outcome of this play?" Unfortunately, I did.

A pitch-out was called. Nervously, I held my breath as Vince finished his delivery. In a single, swift, graceful motion, Ron caught and released the ball. I found myself on "soul time," watching a white blur of a ball approach at nearly 70 miles per hour, insignificant to everyone but those of us in that game.

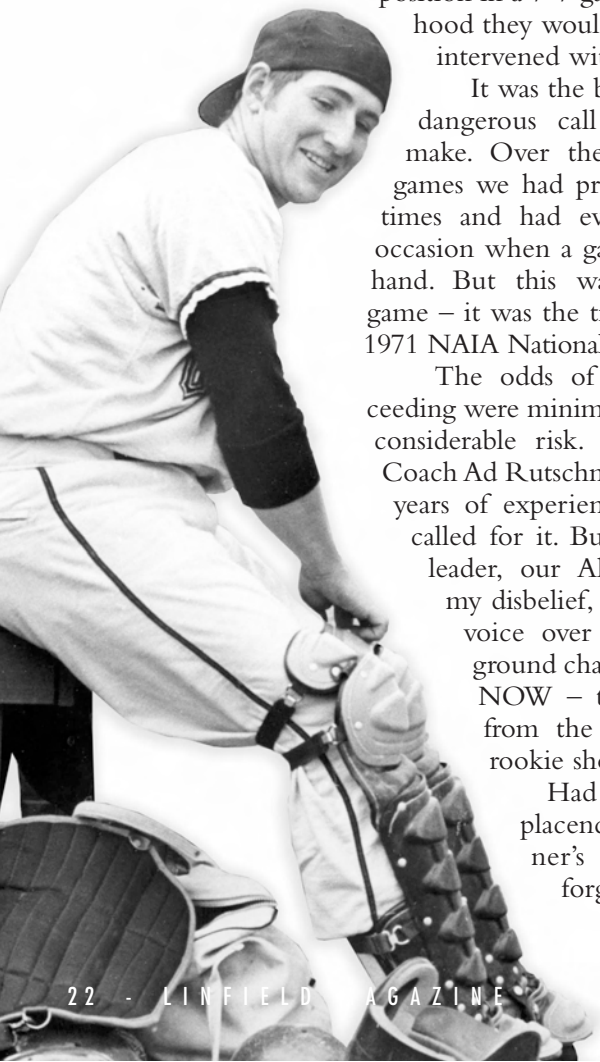
Ron's throw was perfect. The look of surprise and horror in the runner's eyes said it all. The tag caught him nearly a foot off the base. We held them scoreless that inning and went on to win the game, 9-8 in 10 innings.

It was The Play that shifted the momentum that sultry night in Phoenix and earned us the championship. Ron and I knew it; Vince knew it, too. Somehow The Play instilled in me an unqualified feeling of success that even winning the national title could not eclipse.

At every turning point in my life, The Play revisits me. "Buck the Odds," it says. "Go for it." For 25 years, it has inspired me. Why the urgent need to write it down? What turning point is this on the road of life?

As I lie awake this springtime evening listening to the wind testing the new maple leaves outside my window, I hear a faint, yet familiar voice from deep inside my being. "Call it," it urges gently, yet insistently. "You can do it. Call The Play."

(Editor's note: Mike Avery, shortstop on that 1971 baseball team that beat Lipscomb University of Tennessee 9-8 for the national title, returned to complete his degree in 1982 and is a water quality specialist in the Portland area and owns a publishing firm, Susan Creek Books.)



Ron Webb '72



From left, Ryan Smith '08, Dave Bachofner '08, Tyler Stanley '09, Lance Nelson '09, Rennika Doty '11 and Joe Murray '08, all Linfield College athletes, are fighting world hunger through the Feel Good project.

Athletes team up to fight world hunger

Joe Murray '08 has a new appreciation for grilled cheese sandwiches.

Murray, a Linfield College soccer player, has organized the Linfield chapter of Feel Good, a group with ties to the World Hunger Project. Grilled cheese sandwiches are the national organization's signature fundraiser representing the 1.2 billion people worldwide who live on less than \$1 a day.

"I could eat a grilled cheese sandwich every day of my life," said Murray, who became interested in the project last summer during the Semester at Sea. During a stop in South Africa, he partnered with the World Hunger Project, working with malnourished children.

"The experience changed my outlook on life," said Murray. "This is a way of showing others what my eyes have seen."

Murray set to work organizing the chapter when he returned to campus last fall. Word spread quickly among friends, many of whom are athletes, and representatives from every Linfield sport contacted him to express interest.

Organizers hope to raise awareness of world hunger, along with funds to help stop it. They are selling Feel Good T-shirts and photographs, taken by Murray and Lance Nelson '09 during the Semester at Sea. This spring, the group will hold Feel Good Fridays, during which members can wear the shirts. Murray is also planning a Feel Good day, featuring a concert and \$1 grilled cheese sandwiches.

"I've been very fortunate," said Murray, who will earn a marketing degree in June. "I attend a private college and have all the amenities Linfield offers. People live on \$1 a day and I open my wallet and have \$10 sitting there. It's easy to help."



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Kevin Caple '08: Making waves in class, pool

Sport: Swimming

Hometown: Centennial, Colo.

Major: Chemistry and mathematics

GPA: 3.5

Athletic honors: First team all-conference 2005-2007, swimmer of the meet NWC Swim Championships 2007

Top swimming moment: "The 2007 conference championship was one of the best meets of my life and one of the most fun as well."

Favorite professors: "Brian Gilbert, associate professor of chemistry, because I enjoy his teaching style. Steve Bricher, professor of mathematics, because he is an amazing teacher and can relate anything that we are studying to real-world applications."

Favorite class: "Quantum mechanics and thermodynamics, mostly because of the looks I get when I say that."

Internship: "I worked for CH2M Hill OMI in Colorado for the past two summers."

Will miss about Linfield: "The closeness I've developed with my professors; being finished with competitive swimming."

Career plans: Will attend graduate school at Oregon State University in chemical engineering and work part time at CH2M Hill OMI.

